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A SHIRAZ PRAYER-RUG

WHAT is a prayer-rug? The very name, of course, signifies that it is a rug to be used in prayer, but there are details connected with its design and use that make it worth while to answer the question in a brief article.

Every Mohammedan has his prayer-rug, more or less valuable according to his means. This he always carries with him and upon it he prostrates himself five times a day, when the appointed hour for prayer arrives.

By use of a small compass, he spreads his rug so that the mihrab or niche points towards Mecca, where Mohammed's body lies. He removes all jewelry and money from his person, in order to appear before God in the most abject humility, then combs his beard, and produces a rosary of ninety-nine beads and a dried cake of earth which came from Mecca. These he places just under the niche. Resting his head on the earth from Mecca, with his hands outstretched on either side, he performs his devotions.

The mihrab or niche on which the worshipper places his head represents to him the door of a mosque and is intended to remind those who use it of the sacred mosque at Mecca.

More rarely prayer-rugs will be found with three or more niches. They occur especially among the Caucasian products, and are intended for children or for family worship. Other rugs may

have instead of a prayer niche, three small medallions, one each intended for the hands and one to receive the forehead.

For convenience the prayer-rug naturally is of small size. It is usually from two and one-half to four by four to six feet. Those intended for personal use frequently have the name of the owner on and are of the very best workmanship. Combs and other objects used in the act of worship are frequently depicted in or near the prayer niche.

Mr. G. Griffin Lewis, in "The Practical Book of Oriental Rugs," published by the J. B. Lippincott Company, shows how prayer-rugs may be classified, the prayer niche assuming various forms in different kinds of rugs, seldom more than one class having the same form. As a rule that of the Persians is formed by curved lines, while all others are formed by straight lines, those of both the Persian and Turkish classes being pointed, while those of the Caucasian and Turkoman classes may either be pointed or flat at the top, usually the latter.

In differentiating between these various classes, the collector is assisted not only by the shape of the mihrab, but also by the several field designs, such for instance as the panels above and below the prayer field, the lanterns or pendants which hang from the centre of the niche, etc.

CLASSIFICATION

SINGLE PANELS—When only one panel is used it is invariably above the prayer field. The Kulah nearly always has but one, the Anatolian generally, and the Ghiordes seldom.

DOUBLE PANELS—The Ghiordes nearly always has two, the Bergama generally, and the Kulah seldom.

HANGING PENDANTS are always present in the Kaisarieh, frequently in the Ghiordes, and seldom in the Kulah.

PILLARS are always present in the Kaisarieh, frequently in the Kulah, and only occasionally in the Ghiordes.

PLAIN PRAYER FIELDS (excepting the lamp) are most frequent in the Turkish rugs.

FILLED PRAYER FIELDS are invariably present in the Caucasian and Turkoman rugs and generally in the Persians.

The Shiraz prayer-rug, which illustrates this article and is from the collection of Mrs. Willis Holden, of Syracuse, N. Y., is four feet five inches long by three feet wide. In Mr. Lewis's book a valuable feature is the tabulation of the characteristics of the various kinds of Oriental rugs. Shiraz, a city of southern Persia, taps a district that furnishes a wool, "which is not excelled, if equalled, by that of any country in the world."

Shiraz rugs also have the synonym of Mecca, because they were so frequently taken by the shriners to the holy city of Mecca. They are, of course, named after the city of Shiraz, where they are made.

KNOT—Generally the Senna, sometimes the Ghiordes. Number vertically seven to sixteen; number horizontally six to twelve; number to square inch

forty-two to one hundred and ninety-six.

WARP—Generally heavy wool, sometimes goats' hair in the moderns, and frequently more than two woof threads between each row of knots.

WOOF—Always wool, frequently dyed.

NAP—Lustrous, soft, short wool.

WEAVE—Rather loosely woven as a rule.

SIDES—Overcast or braided with wool of two or more colours. Little tassels of wool frequently project from the overcasting on the sides.

ENDS—Web of medium width at each end which is often dyed red, white, and blue, or a plain red selvage with rows of coloured yarns running through it.

BORDER—From two to seven border stripes, some of which frequently carry a vine to which are attached oval-shaped flowers in alternate red and blue. The barber-pole stripe is frequently employed.

PREVAILING COLOURS—Rich colours like wine, autumn foliage, the plumage of birds, deep rich blues, reds, yellows, greens; usually dark blue field.

DYES—Good.

DESIGNS—Pole medallions almost universal. Has as a rule more figures of birds and animals than any other class of rugs. Pear pattern very common. The centre field is frequently filled with diagonal stripes. Flowers scattered throughout the field.

SIZES—Usually medium, four to five by six to eight. Also carpet sizes. Saddle bags are very common.

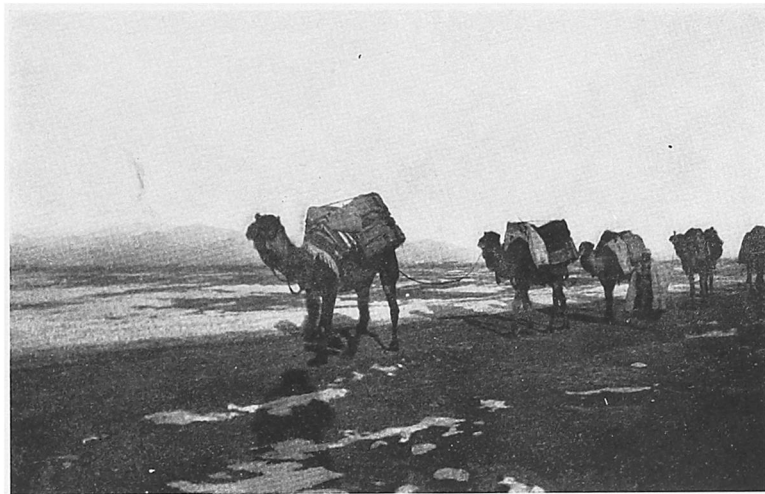
REMARKS—They seldom lie well. They are often crooked and puffed up. The Bergama is the only other rug made with tassels along the sides.



Shiraz Prayer Rug, Size 4'5" x 3'
Property of Mrs. Willis Holden, Syracuse, N. Y.

Among most famous rugs is the Altman prayer-rug, owned by the late Benjamin Altman, of New York City, which was made in North Persia about 1580. It is similar to one which was in the Yerkes sale and to another one which was shown at the recent Munich exhibition of Mohammedan art. It has beautiful floral designs with arabesques and Chinese motifs in deep shades of red, blue, and yellow, many of the designs being worked with light yellow or silver thread in the ghileem style. The Mihrab is the Persian style, from which hangs a mosque lamp that is covered with red, yellow, and pink flowers on a green ground. The lower part of the field is covered with various floral and tree forms in yellow with pink blossoms. There are two border stripes.

The inner one has a yellow ground, the lower part of which is covered with arabesques and the upper part with Arabic inscriptions in blue which read "May the Blessing of God rest upon them all. There is no God but Allah (the true God); Mohammed is the prophet of God. Ali is the saint of God. God the exalted one says: Verily God and His angel shower their blessings upon the prophet. Oh ye faithful send your blessings with Him, as well as offer your salutations unto Him." The outer border has a blue ground upon which are rounded octagons and oblong panels in gray, the latter containing inscriptions from the Koran in black. Size five feet five inches by three feet three inches.



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